

# Evaluation of the Indianapolis Mayor Sponsored Charter Schools

## Tindley Collegiate Second Year Site Review

12/02/2014

Conducted by:

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*SOS*

**School Organizational Solutions, LLC**

## **Second Year Site Visit Report**

**Completed by Members of School Organizational Services (SOS), LLC**

**Name:** Tindley Collegiate Academy

**Date of Review:** 12/2/2014

**Year in the charter contract:** Year Two

**Site visit evaluation team members:** Dr. Terrence Harewood, Cheryl McLaughlin, and Lucy Witte

**Sub-questions addressed in review:**

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?
- 4.2 Are the teaching pedagogies consistent with the school's mission?
- 4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?
- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?
- 4.9 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with special needs?
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related access and services to students with limited English proficiency?

**Second Year Review:** The following report provides key findings from Tindley Collegiate Academy based upon the second year site review conducted by School Organizational Solutions (SOS), LLC. Team members Cheryl McLaughlin, and Terrence Harewood completed a day of classroom observations prior to the Site Team visit. Team member Lucy Witte, who has expertise in special education and experience as a Special Education Director in several large Indianapolis area school districts, completed a full day of special education file reviews, including interviews with key Tindley Collegiate special education personnel prior to the Site Team visit. During the official Site Team visit on December 2, 2014, the site team members conducted stakeholder interviews and document and evidence reviews in order to address the performance indicators of the Mayor's Charter School Performance Framework as outlined above. The process for this evaluation is iterative and the report, along with follow-up meetings, is designed to corroborate information

provided to regulatory bodies and to provide useful feedback to the Mayor's office, school leaders and stakeholders.

The judgments in the report are based upon evidence collected during the process of the school visits. As stated in the Site Visit Protocols for Mayor-Sponsored Charter Schools: "Evidence comes from observations, interviews, and document reviews. The site visit evaluation team should build a base of evidence for each of its findings that would reasonably lead any set of individuals to come to a similar judgment of the school's programs and practices.

# Introduction

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On December 2, 2014, three site visitors conducted the 2014 second year review of Tindley Collegiate Academy. Tindley Collegiate Academy, an all-female middle school serving students from grades 5 through 8, is currently in its second year of operation. This report represents an evaluation about performance in each of the standards and indicators that are the responsibility of SOS, LLC to evaluate for this particular school. These indicators: 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 are outlined in the Performance Framework.

The Site Team engaged in a number of evidence-collecting activities. The focus of this site visit was to gauge perceptions of key stakeholders at the school in relation to the areas of the performance framework that are part of the evaluation. The team conducted focus group discussions with students, staff, special education instructor(s), and parents, as well as interviews with the school administrators.

Classroom observers also spent a day observing students and teachers prior to the site visit. In the following report, standards and indicators are listed with relevant evidence given related to the performance criteria. Following the discussion of each indicator, a summary of strengths and areas for attention are provided for the core question.

## Summary Findings

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?**  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?**  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?**  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?**  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?**  
Finding: **Meets Standard**

- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to English as a Second Language (ESL) students?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**

### **Key Interpretations**

#### **4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

During the site visit, the SOS, LLC site team members observed evidence and heard reports from stakeholders that Tindley Collegiate has an up-to-date curriculum map focused on and aligned with Common Core standards and Indiana state standards. According to school leaders and evidenced in documents, the Tindley Accelerated Schools Network Curriculum Department orchestrates scope and sequence through curriculum mapping that is systematized and institutionalized for all schools in the network and is housed in an online Curriculum Mapping program (Atlas). The program houses standards-based unit plans, pacing guides that frame scope and sequence, and learning ladders, providing a structured format for teachers to create their own curriculum. Teachers report that the online software program also includes sample lesson plans and other resources that are useful to the teachers in planning lessons. Regardless, teachers are required to post their own unit plans and learning ladders (lesson plans) to the curriculum software. The learning ladders are reviewed locally by the administration, and at the district level by the curriculum team. Teachers described a comprehensive, continuous improvement process where lessons are designed based on analysis of student assessment data.

### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- Teachers reported that they have access to an online resource map, which provides sample learning-ladders (lesson plans) that they can model.
- Teachers reported and site team members observed that learning ladders utilize a backward design process.
- Site team members observed posted state standards, unit goals, and daily learning objectives in most classrooms.
- Teachers described and students produced (for site team members) sample learning ladders during the focus group interviews. Learning ladders were also observed in all classrooms during the Class Observations. These learning ladders clearly articulate exactly what students need to know and do on a daily and weekly basis.
- Teachers, students and leaders report that the curriculum is supplemented with high quality resources.
- School leaders report data from standardized tests is used to identify gaps in student achievement and that teachers then have the ability to modify scope and sequence of curriculum and to re-teach standards based on the test results.

### **Recommendations:**

- It was frequently expressed by staff that there is a need for more structured or scripted curriculum resources, especially to support new or lesser experienced teachers. School might consider offering a more scripted curriculum for beginning teachers.
- One school leader concurred that staff members may need additional support in planning curriculum, possibly in the form of an onsite curriculum advisor.

## **4.2 Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?**

### **Finding: Meets Standard**

### **Summary and Specific Commendations:**

Data from the classroom observations conducted by two of the site team members produced much of the evidence used to evaluate this standard. Classroom observers spent 5 hours and 46 minutes (346 minutes) observing 15 classrooms, 267 students, and 16 teachers. On average, each observation lasted 23 minutes and the observed student to teacher ratio was 17:1. Detailed analysis of the data provided significant evidence regarding pedagogical practices at Tindley Collegiate that led to a judgment that the school meets this standard. Classroom observations and teacher focus groups also supported the fact that curriculum is being implemented in classrooms according to its design. Instruction is focused on core learning objectives that align with state standards. A majority of the classrooms observed focused on challenging content (83%) although, less than 50% of classrooms observed were using differentiation strategies.

Teachers were observed utilizing multiple instructional strategies. Whole brain instruction and Lemov's Teach Like a Champion strategies supported many of the instructional strategies. Lemov strategies were used in many classrooms to maximize instructional time and minimize transitions with 100% of classrooms observed showing this as a strength. Site team members also observed Depth of Knowledge being used to inspire critical thinking in a majority of the classrooms.

Student focus groups shared information on lessons that were being taught in their classrooms indicating that they liked the gender and culturally relevant curriculum resources that were utilized to deliver instruction in this all-female student body.

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- Site team members observed a variety of instructional strategies being implemented in the classrooms, including:
  - Tweeting graffiti wall activity
  - Focused imaging
  - Teacher led Q&A
  - Whole brain strategies
  - Reciprocal teaching
  - Role Playing
  - Small groups and DYADS
  - Model Building

- Classroom teachers were also observed engaging students in rigorous higher order thinking skills using Depth of Knowledge tactics.
- School leaders conduct regular walk throughs using the eWalk system.
- Data from the walk through informed the school leaders on areas in need of improvement regarding teaching pedagogies.
- Most students reported that Tindley Collegiate was “harder” than the last school they attended and had higher expectations.
- Students could speak intelligently and in-depth about a concept they were studying in class and many commented favorably on literature they were reading. They liked that their reading material was culturally relevant.

### **Recommendations**

- Teachers consistently identified differentiation as an area in need of growth given the wide variety of student academic levels. Tindley Collegiate should consider providing more PD on differentiation in the classroom.
- Students reported they would like to see more Project Based Learning activities. Many said they rarely were assigned projects at Tindley Collegiate.

### **4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support preparation for post-secondary options?**

This standard is not applicable for Tindley Collegiate since the school only serves students from grades four through eight.

### **4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?**

### **Finding: Meets Standard**

### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

School leaders and teachers reported that Tindley Collegiate Academy uses a wide variety of internal and external assessments that are accurate and useful measures of learning standards/objectives.



Data results are used to either enhance or modify curriculum, as well as to determine which students need to attend the Academic Enhancement period from 3:30 to 5:30 PM daily.

In its organizational structure Tindley Collegiate employs an Assistant Principal who is in charge of Academics (AP Academics). The role of the AP Academics is multi-faceted and includes serving as a testing coordinator, data analyst, teacher performance evaluator to insure that research-based best practices form the basis of classroom instruction, and that teaching pedagogies align with standards that need to be taught. The AP of Academics, along with the School Principal, orchestrate regular learning walks giving relevant feedback to teachers and arranging for peer reviews in order to improve instruction.

School leaders and teachers report that there is a monthly data dive based on the most recent standardized test data. Through the in-depth analysis of the data, mid-course corrections are made to meet students' learning needs. Students may be required to attend the daily Academic Enhancement (AE) period from 3:30 to 5:30 PM or they may be eligible for early release if results are positive. Test results are also used to modify curriculum in order to re-teach standards and tweak the pace of curriculum. The school leaders revealed that all students at Tindley Collegiate are currently on AE, based on results of the last Acuity test scores and in response to recently released state standards.

Students reported being aware of their personal data and could articulate learning goals for themselves, as well as the school.

**Areas of Strength:**

- Stakeholders described a data driven process that uses data from a variety of standardized and teacher created assessments, including Acuity (3 times per year), NWEA (three times per year), ECA, ISTEP, and unit assessments, to guide and modify instruction.
- School leaders and teachers reported that data is analyzed on a monthly basis according to the most recent test (data dive). Decisions are made based on the results of the data dive, e.g. Early Release or Academic Enhancement, re-teaching standards, student grouping, etc.
- Tindley Collegiate has made significant modifications such as mandatory academic enhancement period for all students, teacher generated after school (8<sup>th</sup> period) and before

school (O period) support and Saturday school in response to changes in the State's academic standards as measured by the Acuity test.

**Recommendation:**

None

**4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**Summary and Specific Commendations**

As part of the network of Tindley Accelerated Schools, Tindley Collegiate benefits from a centralized Human Resources system. The school leader explained that the hiring process involves a joint venture between the network and the school. Recruitment of high quality teachers includes attendance at various job fairs, and posting current positions on sites such as ATS on Demand. The school leader noted the school is also in the process of developing a relationship with Indiana State University in an effort to build a pipeline for recruiting and retaining high quality teachers into the Tindley network. The principal cites this as an important step to address the problem of teacher retention, an issue that Tindley Collegiate, like most Charter Schools, continue to struggle with.

To support teachers in their professional growth, the school has an extensive training and development system in place. Teachers are oriented into the "Tindley model" through a three-week intensive summer institute. Teachers receive regular observations from the school leadership and reported that they benefit from the feedback. In addition, teachers are required to submit a professional growth plan and receive two formal observations annually. Weekly professional development and other network-leveraged professional development opportunities also serve to buttress teachers' professional growth. Noting that, "It is hard to work here," given the focus on accountability, the school leader noted that the school is providing efforts to develop teacher-leaders. These efforts include opportunities for teachers to conduct professional development with their colleagues based on their strengths, and partnering stronger or more experienced teachers with beginning teachers.

The site team also saw evidence that teachers were certified and teaching in areas that matched their certification. Given the preponderance of evidence pointing to a well-developed human resource system, and recent efforts to address gaps in teacher retention, the site team concluded that the school warrants a meets standard.

**Other Areas of Strength:**

- Schools within the Tindley network are supported through a centralized human resource system. In addition to attending job fairs, the school uses ATS online system and has recently developed a relationship with Indiana State University School of Education to assist with recruiting qualified applicants.
- All staff members complete a professional growth plan. Teachers receive two formal observations in addition to frequent informal observations by school leaders.
- Teachers receive extensive P.D. session every Friday, as well as a 3-week summer institute/orientation.
- The school leader and some staff members reported that school leadership, based on perceived needs, makes P.D. decisions.

**Areas for Improvement:**

- Teaching at Tindley Collegiate is challenging and demanding as reported by teachers and school leaders. Many teachers indicated that they are committed to the missions and culture of the school.
- Teachers reported needing positive affirmation for their herculean efforts.
- Some teachers expressed that they often feel undervalued and taken for granted.
- Students also expressed concern that teachers were not acknowledged or rewarded for the great contributions they made.
- The site team was concerned because many stakeholders emphasized the high teacher turnover at Tindley Collegiate.

**Recommendations**

- School should consider developing a system to affirm teachers and promote a feeling of value to address the issue of potential waning teacher morale.

#### 4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?

##### **Finding: Meets Standard**

##### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

One of the strengths of Tindley Collegiate is its ability to clearly convey and elicit buy in to its mission by all stakeholders. The daily school wide and classroom rituals, organization of the school's culture, posting and reciting of the scholars' creed, all serve to promote the schools' college attendance mission. The site team found overwhelming evidence to support a meets standard.

##### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- All stakeholders understand and appreciate the school's mission to prepare and to expect all students will go to college. All could recite the student centered, college bound mission

##### **Areas for Improvement:**

- None

#### 4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?

##### **Finding: Meets Standard**

##### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

As noted previously, prior to the Site Visit, two team members observed all the teachers at Tindley Collegiate. The team members were able to observe students transitioning to their various classes and benefitted from observing the students with multiple teachers. The site team did not observe a single behavioral infraction during close to six hours of classroom observation. On-task behaviors contributed to almost 100% of classroom time devoted to instruction. Students were engaged in the lessons and teachers consistently used a call-and-response technique to re-orient and refocus students as needed.

The school has clear rules for enforcing behavior that are clearly articulated in the student/parent handbook. The site team observed rules posted in 100% of the classrooms and expectations were framed in terms of positive behaviors expected as opposed to punitive behaviors not acceptable. The discipline approach possesses high expectations for student behavior that are consistent with

the school's mission. The interactions between students and staff, staff and staff, and staff and administration are positive, supportive and collaborative. The site team primarily observed care and respect among students and between students and teachers. The team adjudged the school as meets standard.

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- The school has a very explicit behavioral plan, which is articulated in the staff planner. (SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF)
- Parents and teachers overwhelmingly referenced the positive culture of the school as the central reason why they selected this school.
- One teacher quipped, "Now I can actually teach which is what I am hired to do as opposed to spend valuable class time on discipline."
- The site team observed orderly and efficiently ran classrooms and 100%.
- Parents reported they appreciated the bar being set high for behavioral and academics.
- Students expressed great admiration for the school principal saying she brightened up every room she walked in.

#### **Areas for Improvement:**

- School should consider ways to support staff morale and avoid potential teacher burnout.
- Students uniformly reported feeling stressed regarding rigid behavior expectations e.g. walking on the seam of the carpet and standing at scholarly attention for long periods of time.
- Teachers and students expressed concern about a perceived lack of consistently implemented consequences.

#### **4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?**

#### **Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations:**

Parents and school leaders reported that there is a wide variety of ways in which the school communicates with stakeholders at Tindley Collegiate Academy. They said communication was frequent, strong, and conducted through multiple sources, citing: weekly newsletters, frequent texts from teachers, emails, phone calls, a Robo-call system, and weekly progress reports. Parents described a process where students must have their "planners" (which include the weekly progress

reports) signed every Friday. Parents said they liked that there were no surprises at TCA, stating, “You know at the end of every week how your child is doing in school.”

**Strengths:**

- School leaders, parents, and students, all reported that communication was effective and strong at Tindley Collegiate Academy
- Parents and students both praised the school leader. Parents said they liked that she was consistent in her values and in the way she treated all students and parents. Students reported that the school leader was approachable, knew all students, and cared about all of them. One student said, “She comes into a room and brightens it right up.” Another student said the school leader had the ability to come into any room and take the place of the teacher without “missing a step.”
- The students are provided regular updates on their progress through the weekly report cards.
- Teachers are required to make and log a minimum of 10 calls per week, to parents.
- Students use daily learning ladders which keep parents informed of their daily learning

**Recommendations:**

- Teachers expressed concern about the requirements to have a minimum number of calls logged, noting that it created the impression that they were not trusted.
- Students reported that they received very little positive feedback or praise from teachers. Perhaps a mini PD on ways to give students positive feedback would help.

**4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

**Summary and Specific Commendations:**

A comprehensive review of all 34 special education files at Tindley Collegiate was conducted. This review provided critical information regarding general trends in the documentation and delivery of special education services at the school. Tindley Collegiate was found to have instituted numerous systems in compliance with state and federal mandates regarding special education. The school has in place an individual file for each student receiving special education services. These files were also neatly organized and in a locked file cabinet. From the file review it appeared that all case conferences were held in a timely manner. There were previously held case conference reports and

IEPs on move-in students in these files. From conversations with staff and special education supervisors, there is a model of push-in and pull-out services being implemented.

The delivery of special education services is a highly sensitive aspect of a school and one that can be potentially litigious and costly to a school. It is important to keep in mind in the area of special education that “policies and procedures are our friends as they protect us in what we do best.”

Consequently, schools are encouraged to be proactive in ensuring that the appropriate documentation is made and available upon request. When reviewing the federal placement codes of the students with disabilities attending Tindley Collegiate, the following data was observed: 94% (32/34) had an LRE 50, 3% (1/34) of the students with disabilities had an LRE of 51 and 3% (1/34) had an LRE 57.

#### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- The school utilizes the state electronic IEP system so that all legally required topics are included.
- The files for students with disabilities are kept in a secure location with a system in place for signing them out if reviewed by staff members.
- The special education files are well organized.
- The special education supervisor was present and available to answer questions and to clarify procedural questions.
- Based on the data observed in the files, all case conference meetings were held in a timely manner.
- The special education teachers were knowledgeable of their students' needs and strengths.
- The school had written policies and procedures in place for special education.

#### **Recommendation**

- 88% (30/34) of the special education files had the Notice of Case Conference Meeting.
- 62% (21/34) of the special education files had the educational evaluation in the student's file.
- 79% (27/34) of the special education files had the previous IEP in the student's file.
- 74% (25/34) of the special education files had documentation of Progress on the Goal Reports.
- Having the previous educational evaluation and IEP is critical information in allowing the case conference committee the ability to make informed decisions. The Site team

realizes the challenge to receiving educational evaluations from previous schools.

However diligence must be maintained to ensure that Best Practice prevails in this area.

- Having 100% compliance on completion of adequate notice of case conferences and progress reports is crucial. Timely communication with families are requirements of Article 7.

#### **4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations to access and services to students with limited English?**

### **Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

At the time of the site visit, Tindley Collegiate did not enroll any students with limited English proficiency. To access this standard, the site team examined evidence of a process in place that would easily facilitate services to such students in a timely and legal manner. The site team found such a process outlined by the school. The evidence warrants a meets standard.

#### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- None

#### **Areas of Improvement:**

- None

#### **Recommendation:**

- None